



November 29, 2000

The Honorable Gary Locke  
Governor of the State of Washington  
P.O. Box 40002  
Olympia, Washington 98504-0002

Dear Governor Locke:

It is with great pride that we submit the attached recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation. Thirty years of population and economic growth have led Washington into a transportation crisis. We must act now to prevent the gridlock on our roads and highways from irreparably damaging the state's environmental health and economic prosperity and diminishing the personal well-being of citizens.

The result of over two years of work is a comprehensive and bold set of actions that will get us moving again. Our recommendations chart a new direction that will prevent this state from being overwhelmed by the demands of the future while making progress on the problems of today.

Business as usual is not meeting the public's transportation needs. Fundamental changes to transportation planning, finance, construction and service must be made. We are proposing an integrated package of reforms, actions and priorities that will meet the common needs and varying challenges of our growing state. Implementing this new transportation vision will not be simple, and it will require legislative, regulatory and operational change, which the public not only demands, but also deserves.

In Washington state, we measure outcomes in education, public health, human services and other areas. However, we do not measure transportation outcomes. To solve our transportation problems and restore public confidence, we recommend setting clear benchmarks and performance standards, then holding agencies accountable to meeting them. We also recommend tying transportation funding to performance measured against these goals and benchmarks.

Our state needs a single point of responsibility and accountability for managing the statewide transportation system and a way to evaluate its efficiency and effectiveness. We recommend granting the Governor direct oversight of the Washington State Department of Transportation, including the appointment of its secretary. The current Transportation Commission will assume a new role as the Transportation Accountability Commission with responsibility to monitor and report on the progress of all transportation agencies throughout the state in meeting established benchmarks and performance standards.

There are areas of the transportation system that are not operating as efficiently as they should be. Therefore, the state must demonstrate fiscal responsibility and stretch limited resources by improving the system's efficiency. We recommend capping administrative costs and eliminating legislative and regulatory barriers that keep agencies from sharing resources and employing cost-saving techniques. We also recommend streamlining the permitting process so projects can be built faster while still protecting the environment.

The transportation network that connects every corner of Washington is critical to our society and economy. Everyone benefits from this strong system that moves people, goods and freight. It is paramount to invest in our statewide transportation system to keep it functioning well. Cities, counties and the state must do the basics first: ensuring that roads and highways are well maintained and safe; sustaining transit services, including ferries; strengthening bridges to withstand earthquakes; and making appropriate improvements to keep pace with growth.

While we do have common basic needs, unique challenges arise in different parts of Washington. It is time for our state to realize that one size does not fit all. For example, transportation problems and solutions in Vancouver are different than those in Spokane, and the ability for Wenatchee to fund local improvements is different from that in Seattle. We recommend empowering regions to solve their own transportation problems, if they choose to do so, by granting them new authority, flexibility and revenue options.

The cost of solving our crisis is not cheap, and efficiencies alone will not be enough to fund and fix our problems. There is \$150 billion worth of transportation needs across the state over the next 20 years. Current revenues will cover \$55 billion, leaving a shortfall of \$95 billion. We recommend raising \$8-12 billion over the next six years and an additional \$30-40 billion by 2020. To resolve the remaining \$40-50 billion of costs, we recommend implementing aggressive efficiencies, traffic demand management, telecommuting and other emerging technologies.

To raise the necessary funds, we propose a mix of taxes and fees phased in over a number of years. This phasing will allow transportation agencies time to implement the necessary efficiencies and prepare for expanded services and construction projects. Our revenue recommendations are based on two principles: those who use the transportation system should fund it, and there must be a fair balance of funding among roads, transit and other transportation choices.

It will take time to get out of the current transportation mess, but we do not have to wait years to see progress—nor should the public be asked to wait. We have created a six-year “early action” strategy that will provide \$8-12 billion to fund key maintenance projects, fix some of the worst congestion points in the state, keep ferries and transit operating, and ensure that freight is getting to our ports quickly. With decisive action in January, we can implement the early action strategy, raise public confidence in the system, and begin to turn the tide on gridlock.

If enacted, our recommendations will ensure a safe and reliable statewide system, ease congestion, speed delivery of products to port, preserve the quality of our air, and give the public transportation choices. This means people will be able to spend more time living their lives, not

sitting in traffic. Our businesses will be confident that they can grow and prosper instead of looking to relocate. Our children will inherit an environment that is not choked by smog. And, people will be able to choose from a number of safe and sound ways to get from one place to another.

We look forward to discussing our recommendations with you and working to implement them as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

THE BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON TRANSPORTATION